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## Red as Rubies



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### Chapter 1 by Florenceia

The trees ripped at her exposed face, leaving deep gashes across her pale cheek bones. Ruby tears drip down her face. Her elegant night gown trailed behind her in tatters. Gasping in every, cold breath she runs in terror deeper into the shadows of the forest. Her next step brings her to the ground, exhausted and spent. She hardly notices the darkness of her fainting compared to the darkness of the wood.

A ray of light penetrates her closed eyelids, turning them red as blood. As she stirs awake she feels a soft quilt against her exposed shoulders. Sitting up she takes in her surroundings with a drowsy eye. She is in a large room, lounging on a bed of soft skins; deer, rabbit, wolf, elk, and others she doesn't recognize. A huge fire roars in the center of the room, reaching less than a foot below the ceiling. Shawls in the colors of autumn and spring hung from branches placed where rafters should have been.

Moving to get up slowly she doesn't realize she is not clothed, until the soft quilt that had embraced her so warmly fell away to reveal the soft skin of her bare chest and legs. With a gasp she grabs at the quilt to cover her once again. Her eyes scan the room looking to find a decent pair of clothing. Her eyes land on a dark red skirt reaching her knees, a cream blouse, a lace-up bodice, and a some knee high boots.

She pulls on blouse. The small frame of her dress squeezes her large breasts to the soft fabric. Lacing up the crimson bodice, she finds the laces are too small. With a look of displeasure she continues to struggle. The skirt is too short. She looks down at her too short skirt and knee long boots.

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Fully dressed she exits the room and walks down a winding hallway. As she enters what seems like a kitchen her eyes open wide, wholly unprepared for what she finds. Sitting at a table in a kitchen next to a fire with a pot of something over it, is a family of people. But they aren't people. with flowing silver hair, beautiful eyes, and abnormally pointed ears they cannot be anything, but elves. Elves of the Wood.

"Glad to see you're up, love," said an accent she could not place. The voice comes from a slim women whose feeding a child who hardly looks a day over four. "Here, have some grub," the lady offers.

"Th-thank?" responds a bewildered Arabella. "You wil call me Arrabella." With a look of barely hidden disgust she sits down between two girls, one twelve the other fifteen, and tucks into the potatoes and greens set before her.

After a few spoonfuls she sets her spoon down. "What am I doing in a lowly elves home, surrounded by such filth?" the aristocratic women spits suddenly eyeing the table with a look of such disgust masking her face.

Silence, then...

"Well we saved your ruddy ass, so you should be thanking us, not looking at us like we're dirt speared on the end of your shoe!" the girl on Arabella's right (the fifteen year old) bursts in response.

"Well you are dirt on the tip of my shoe," Arabella sneers.

"Just shut up, will ya!" shouts a boy across from her.

Arabella begins to rise, trying to be intimidating since she is the(surprisingly) tallest of them all, but she realizes the boy is shouting to the girl on Arabella's right, his sister.

"Stay out of this, Zachary!" she shouted standing up and banging her fists on the table, causing a mug to topple over.

"I have every right to be in this, Callen!" he shouts back standing up too.

"STOP THIS NONSENSE!" a voice exclaims suddenly from the end of the table silencing even the youngest.

Everyone seemed surprised to hear a young woman near the age of Arabella, in her early 20's.

"stop acting like little children, Allena behaves better than you," she motions to the silent

girl at the other end. "And you," she pointed at Arabella, "quit acting like you are some saint or a god, you are nothing more than a filthy elf." She sat down and quietly resumed eating.

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Two months later,

"Damn you!" shouted Callen, who had been pushed accidentally by her twin, Zachary.

"Why don't you watch where you're going, maybe then you won't go around dropping thing."

"You bumped into me, so it's your fault, idiot!" she shouts back.

"How about you stop bickering and pick up the beets, huh," Arabella interveined.

Glaring at her the twins grudgingly bent down next to the 23 year old.

"This ain't settled yet," whispered Callena. With a laugh/sigh Arabella picks up her basket and Callena's.

"Hey, give that back," protests Callena.

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," responded Arabella.

In the past two months Arabella had lost her blue-blooded attitude; she began to warm up to the family of wood elves. She had began to help around the house, an underground maze hid under an ancient oak.

After taking in the baskets of vegetables to the cellar everyone headed in for supper, besides Arabella who stays outside.

An autumn breeze carries her hair, taking the ribbon pinning it in a bun. With a soft rustle, auburn hair tumbles down her shoulders in small ringlets. She stares at the fiery landscape of autumn reminding her of the flames licking up the walls of her room. The night plays back in her head.

She was sleeping when a searing pain in her arm waked her up. The thick smoke made her eyes water. Her nightgown was drenched with sweat. Choking she made her way down the blazing corridor. Splinters flew. A sharp crack above her signaled to her the falling roof. Jumping out of the way she lands on her burnt hand. With a cry, she manages to get up just in time to see the stairs fall away. In desperation she opens an intact window. There was nothing left to jump and pray she wouldn't die, laying on the ground three stories below. After surviving the landing she had run deep into the forest and woken up in the underground room.

The golden-red leaves swaying in the breeze reminded Arabella of the fluorescent flames that had eaten at her house. Her arm had healed, but the mangled scar is still there to remind her of that unfaithful night.

She looks down at her bare arm. The skin is twisted and red. The scar started at her wrist and spanned the length of her arm

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she was feeling down. An hour later they were still there, sitting down and looking at the stars. Their minds lost in thought. Listening to the whisper of the past.

While the girls took a trip down memory lane, in a town near a harbor, called Yurti, was a crowded tavern. A man in a cloak of midnight sat motionless at the bar. His straining ears sifted through the mumble of the crowd to hear a shred of information concerning his current mission. Though he tried to stay concentrated on his task his mind wandered to his previous mission. His job had been to find the witch and burn her through until her corpse was a mere husk of a human shell. It had been a success, not even the bones remained, just ashes.

Something suddenly pulled him from his thoughts.

"I heard the Mareman girl survived the fire down at the old manor," said someone, "She was seen running into the forest."

"She's probably dead if she went to that place, not even the bravest hunter dare set foot in that place."

"I heard magic creatures and monsters of the past still dwell there."

The man slammed his mug down onto the table smashing the cup. As beer dripped through his hands he stormed out of the tavern.

He must find her. He must kill the witch. He must destroy Arabella Mareman. He must stop the heart that pumped the magic through her veins. He rushes to the docks without a moment's hesitation. He quickly scanned the destinations of each ship.

"Dorctern Port, Blackwell River, Banubine, Ellvena (pronounce Eyvena), Merborn, Toupka does it ever end." His head snapped back to the fourth name. "Ellvena, that was it, that was the accursed town of the wench." "She will be stopped before her power grows," thought he. He pulled a pouch out of his belt and walked over to the cargo ship going across the Nermanday river to Ellvena. As he boards the ship a crewman tries to stop him, but before he reaches the assassin a knife is already sunk in his thick throat. Stepping over the body he makes his way to the Captain, the big man in the red coat giving orders.

"May I buy passage upon this ship?" he asked, but before the Captain could form any words, the assassin continues, "If not then I am willing to do the same to you and your crew to what I did to the body bleeding upon your deck." As the words left his lips a cry rang out. "I see your crew's

captain the body" he said with a slight smile, his eyes never leaving his quarry.

The captain's mouth hung agape. He had never seen a stranger, not the murder who had trespassed on his ship. Shaking his head he said something. "You've trespassed on my ship, kill me." "I will not," the man said, "my destination, what else do you want?" the man demanded in a rushed whisper his eyes raging, but sad.

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